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Written statement* submitted by the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[26 May 2014]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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The Electoral Threshold Problem in Political Representation of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights protects the right to everyone "to take part in the government of his country" and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities states that "persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in decisions on the national and, where appropriate, regional level concerning the minority to which they belong or the regions in which they live, in a manner not incompatible with national legislation".

The representation of ethnic minorities in political life is a strong indicator of the level of minority rights in modern democracies. Ethnic minorities can either have a right to self-government or they can participate in legislative institutions at both national and local level or take part in consultative bodies in order to take a key role in decision-making processes which are interest to them. Members of ethnic minorities can nominate through non-minority/majority parties or they form their own parties and achieve representation at the national and regional level.

It is very important that parties and legislation are inclusive and represent broader society including ethnic minorities. Electoral law or electoral system does have a great impact on the full and effective participation of persons, including persons belonging to national minorities. Only few states provide for specific rules on the representation of minorities in the elected bodies, but there are no established democracies that have adopted quota laws for ethnic minorities. Yet there have been efforts among political parties to widen their support and get their votes among ethnic communities and to recruit ethnic minority candidates in local and national elections.

The European Union has established protection of minorities as a pre-condition in the accession of candidate countries to the EU. This has provided the development of institutional rules in Eastern European countries throughout their accession process. The Turkish minority in Bulgaria and the Hungarian minority in Romania have established their own political parties despite different institutional frameworks. Romania has introduced special provisions to guarantee that they have a seat in the Romanian Parliament.

This pre-accession criteria regarding protection of minority rights are not applied in old EU members states. The Turkish minority in Western Thrace[1], Greece, is not adequately represented in national and regional level and in decision making processes. The electoral system referred as "reinforced proportionality" is a form of semi-proportional representation with a 3% of electoral threshold for political parties and independent candidates and an awarded extra 50 seats for the political party that wins a plurality of votes cast. Under the

[1] Turkish Minority of Western Thrace has an estimated population of 150.000, does comprise 1.3% of the general population (2001 census) and it constitutes majority in Rhodope (52%) and almost half of the population in Xanthi(45%). There is an officially recognized Muslim minority of 140.000 to 150.000 members reside in Thrace (Western Thrace) and the status of the Minority is determined by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Although the Treaty of Lausanne does not specifically mention the ethnic identity of the Muslim minority in Western Thrace, there is a specific reference to the Turkish ethnic identity of the Muslim Minority in Western Thrace in legal and international documents. "Etabli Documents" which were the documents given to the people of Greek and Turkish origin who were left out of the exchange procedure in accordance with the provisions of the Agreement on the Exchange of Turkish and Greek Populations on 30 January 1923 mentioned the ethnic origin of Muslim minority in Western Thrace as Turkish.

current electoral system of reinforced proportionality, political parties and independent candidates cannot enter the Parliament unless they obtain at least 3 % of the votes throughout the country, although they may have enough votes to get electoral seats in specific electoral districts. This makes it almost impossible for members of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace to be elected to the Parliament as independent candidate, therefore members of the Minority stand for elections from majority parties. In the last elections, three persons belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace were elected to the Greek Parliament. The deputies are Mr. Ahmet Hacıosman, PASOK MP for Rhodope; Mr. Ayhan Karayusuf, SYRIZA MP for Rhodope; Mr. Hüseyin Zeybek, SYRIZA MP for Xanthi.

The regional administration in Greece has gone an extensive reform process, of which second phase was implemented in 2010. The number of municipalities have been reduced to 325, and 54 prefectures have been merged into 13 administrative regions, i.e. peripheries. Each region acquired a directly elected governor (periferiarchis) and regional council roughly proportional to its population. Political parties are not permitted to contest local and regional elections and, therefore, the elections are contested by open regional lists headed by a candidate governor. In practice, however, most of these lists are openly created, supported or otherwise endorsed by political parties. In all local elections, the winning candidacy list is guaranteed a minimum three-fifths majority in the respective councils. In 2010, Greece held its first regional elections concurrently held with municipal elections. The elections for the regional governors and councils take place every five years under a two-round majority run-off electoral system where the winning list elects the governor. The regional elections with municipal elections in Greece will be held on 18 May 2014 (first round) and 25 May 2014 (second round). Following the first and second round municipal elections in Greece, three members of the Turkish minority in Arriana (Kozlukebir), Iasmos(Yassıköy) and Myki(Mustafçova) municipalities have been elected as mayor.[2] Unfortunately, there is no member of the Turkish minority whom has been nominated in the regional list as vice regional governor for regional units of Rhodope or Xanthi.

Events in Greece before the elections show that Western Thrace Turkish Minority is perceived and accepted as "the other" in Greece. New Democracy (NEA) Party Rodopi Deputy and former Minister of Education and Religious Affairs Evripidis Stilyanidis gave reportage to Greek daily Elefteros Typos on 27 April 2014. Stilyanidis' statements regarding the Western Thrace Turkish Minority received big reactions. According to Birlik, a daily of Western Thrace Turkish Minority, Stilyanidis affirmed the necessity to introduce new regulations to country's administrative structure on the grounds that the municipalities have been Islamized especially when the examples of Maroneia and Iasmos were taken into account. Further to this point, Stilyanidis suggested the municipalities in Western Thrace, which were predominantly run by the Western Thrace Turkish Minority, shall be redistributed to those which were run by Christians.

Starting in 2014, peripheral and municipal elections are to be held every five years, concurrently with elections for the European Parliament. At the second round of local elections in Greece, on 25 May 2014, European Parliament elections will be held in Greece. Greece comprises one national electoral district for the EP elections and the electoral threshold is 3%, while 14 EU countries do not apply any electoral threshold for the EP elections. 49 political parties are participated in the EP 2014 elections, and party lists are closed and blocked. For the first time in history minority political party Friendship, Equality,

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2 http://www.ekloges.ypes.gr/may2014/dn/public/index.html#{"page":"level","params":{"level":"snom_n","id":1}}

Peace (FEP) Party has run for the EP elections, with 38 candidates from Rhodope, Xanthi and Evros.

With the slogan 'Europe Europe Hear Our Voice', FEP Party participated in the EP elections in order to give the message "We are Here Aswell" to Athens and Europe. FEP Party announced that they participated in the elections to give the necessary message to the mindset which does not take into consideration the demands of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. Following the results of the EP elections in Greece, FEP Party has been the first party in Rhodope and Xanthi, where the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace lives. The minority party has won 41, 68% in Rhodope and 25, 89% in Xanthi. The party has been the third party and has received 42.533 votes with 12.25% share of the vote in Eastern Macedonia-Thrace Prefecture. Since the party has received 46.620 votes and won 0.76% of at the nationwide.[3] The results clearly indicate how the application of 3% threshold for individuals prevents the Turkish minority from electing their representatives freely.

ABTTF urges the Greek authorities to:

- abolish 3% electoral threshold quota for political parties and independent candidates on national elections,
- introduce special provisions to guarantee that the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace is represented in the Greek Parliament,
- abolish 3% electoral threshold quota national elections on EP elections,
- ensure that the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace participates in legislative institutions at regional, local and national level or takes part in consultative bodies in order to take a key role in decision-making processes which are interest to them.

[3] For FEP Party's elections results
http://www.ekloges.ypes.gr/may2014/e/public/index.html#{"cls":"party","params":{"id":73}}